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171102Z Oct 05

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 007082

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EB/IFD/ODF, AF, AND EUR/WE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: EAID PREL FR

SUBJECT: Small is Beautiful? France's "Co-Development" Program Showing Signs of Success

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. After 20 years, the MFA's "Co-Development" Program has finally started to bear fruit. France's co-development program seeks to benefit both France and countries from which many of France's illegal migrants come by helping potential and actual migrants create their own small businesses in their countries of origin. The MFA sees this program as a useful tool in combating clandestine immigration and in helping to fight poverty in developing countries. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Econ Couns and intern recently called on Christian Connan, Ambassador in Charge of "Co-Development," to learn more about this small but increasingly successful development program. The challenge of immigration has proven to be a divisive and complicated issue in France. In 2002, the total number of immigrants that had entered French territory was estimated at over 3.3 million, and over 45% of these immigrants have come from the Magreb or French-speaking Africa.

¶3. (SBU) Amb. Connan explained that France's Co-Development Program has had a long history, with more failures than successes. First started by the Socialist Government in the 1980's, it was a project with a political goal designed to forge partnerships in the developing world and as a means to counter the "U.S.'s capitalist influence," Connan said wryly. He explained that the program evolved in the 90's under the then-Interior Minister, Jean-Pierre Chevremont, to become a tool to attempt to control immigration flows into France, but again it delivered mixed results at best.

¶4. (SBU) In 2002, the MFA took over the program and altered it by creating the position of 'Ambassador-Delegate' for Co-Development and re-casting (and selling to parliament) the program as a development policy with incidental immigration benefits. The program now appears to be making an impact, even if only on a small-scale. In Mali, the example with which Connan was most familiar, the program has been in place for three years and is beginning to create employment and an "entrepreneurial culture."

¶5. (SBU) Outlining some details of the program in Mali, Connan explained that the GOF Co-Development Program operates in three ways:
-- it aides immigrants to return to Mali with small budgets to realize small-scale projects (ie: cultivating several hectares of land they may own, opening up a small business, etc.);
-- it encourages investment in Mali by ethnic Malians resident in France by helping them target their remittances toward programs and enterprises that train and educate Malian citizens;
-- and it sends qualified Malians resident in France, such as doctors, researchers and businessmen, back to Mali to take part in temporary aid projects with a focus on capacity building.

Connan reported that approximately 350 Malians have returned to their country. Those individuals have in turn created an additional 350 jobs. With a failure rate of only 10% and creation of 700 net jobs, the MFA considers the Mali program quite successful, Connan explained. He added that results in other countries in which the program has been operating have been similarly successful.

¶6. (SBU) The Co-Development program will continue to expand in 2005 with operations planned in Senegal, the Comoros, Ethiopia, several Sub-Saharan Francophone African nations, and Haiti. In 2005, the MFA spent around 2 million euros on this program and in 2006, spending will increase to 6 million euros.

Comment:

¶7. (SBU) An interesting idea with multiple benefits, the Co-Development Program still causes some controversy. The

explicit goal of encouraging migrants to return to their homeland and the targeting of certain nationalities that will "benefit" from the program, sits uncomfortably in some quarters. However, the emphasis on investment and enhancing the value of human resources is an innovative and potentially effective way of promoting development in the poorest countries, while also dealing - albeit in a small way -- with the sensitive issue of immigration. This is an interesting alternative to France's larger-scale development programs. It will be interesting to see whether the results obtained over the past three years continue and can be replicated more broadly.

STAPLETON